Unit .06

Session .02

A Place for God's Presence

Scripture

Exodus 36:2-7; 39:42-43; 40:34-38

2 So Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person in whose heart the LORD had placed wisdom, all whose hearts moved them, to come to the work and do it. **3** They took from Moses's presence all the contributions that the Israelites had brought for the task of making the sanctuary. Meanwhile, the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. **4** Then all the artisans who were doing all the work for the sanctuary came one by one from the work they were doing **5** and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than is needed for the construction of the work the LORD commanded to be done." **6** After Moses gave an order, they sent a proclamation throughout the camp: "Let no man or woman make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." So the people stopped. **7** The materials were sufficient for them to do all the work. There was more than enough. … **42** The Israelites had done all the work according to everything the LORD had commanded Moses. **43** Moses inspected all the work they had accomplished. They had done just as the LORD commanded. Then Moses blessed them. … **34** The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **35** Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **36** The Israelites set out whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle throughout all the stages of their journey. **37** If the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out until the day it was taken up. **38** For the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and there was a fire inside the cloud by night, visible to the entire house of Israel throughout all the stages of their journey.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God desires to be near His people.

Option 1

Place students on teams and give each team the task of building a place of worship out of whatever materials they have been given. Provide such things as a stack of index cards, straws, tape, play building bricks, or other building materials to each group. Allow teams to present their creations and describe the elements they included.

- **Did you enjoy not having any detailed instructions? Why or why not?**
- **What would have happened if you had been given very specific instructions for the building process?**

Without any guidelines, there could be as many different styles for a place of worship as there are people to build them. In today's session, we reach the place where the people built the tabernacle to house the presence of God. God was very specific about every single detail of the tabernacle, but not without reason.

Option 2

We make all kinds of preparations to travel: We choose a destination, make reservations, invite others along, and we pack. Ask students to share one item they always carry with them when they travel. This item should be something that isn't "necessary" to travel. Examples could be a journal, lucky socks, or headphones. The point is to help them examine this question: "What would I not want to leave home without?"

The Israelites left the home they know, taking their belongings and spoils from the Egyptians. Those items would help them build a the tabernacle, the very place God would dwell with them. But most importantly, it was God who freed them and God who would go with them as they journeyed to the place He promised would be waiting for them. The One they never left home without needed a place to dwell among them, and the items they took from the Egyptians would help them accomplish just that.

TEACHING PLAN

In Exodus 36:2-7, the disastrous idolatry of the golden calf united the Israelites as people who had experienced God's forgiveness. When they were asked to give their gold and precious items for the construction of the tabernacle, they kept giving until they were asked to stop.

Read Exodus 36:2-7.

- **What do you think motivated the Israelites to keep giving?**

What has the power to change a selfish, demanding heart? What can make someone who hoards their possessions want to give to others? Simply this: grace. Only grace can move us from being people who always want more to becoming people who keep giving more until we're told to stop.

The Israelites weren't wealthy people. Yes, they left Egypt with gold and jewelry, but it was given to them by the Egyptians at God's prompting (Ex. 12:35-36). When Moses asked the people to give their possessions to the Lord, they didn't give because they had so much they'd never miss anything—they gave because God had been at work in their hearts. God was changing them.

- **Do you think they gave because they wanted to (cheerfully) or because they had to (begrudgingly)? Why?**

For the tabernacle, everything worked out perfectly. After the raw materials were gathered, two master craftsmen—Bezalel and Oholiab, as well as those working under them—began constructing the tent and all the furnishings. The inspired biblical writer noted that their skills were God-given (Ex. 36:1).

- **What does the text infer about God's gifting people artistically?**

This story of the tabernacle's construction is a great reminder that God creates people with various gifts to be used for His kingdom and for the good and joy of others. We don't necessarily need to go into full-time vocational ministry in order to make much of Christ with our lives—both Bezalel and Oholiab were able to glorify God by being the artists and craftsmen God created them to be. This should be encouraging as you think about your own giftedness and what you will do one day as a profession.

Read Exodus 39:42-43.

Exodus 25–31 describe in great detail how God designed the tabernacle, and its blueprint is filled with hints of the gospel. Christianity is an inside-out faith, meaning a changed heart leads to a changed life. What we need most of all is a heart transformed by God and His mercy, not an outward change in our actions. Likewise, the tabernacle is an inside-out structure. The message of the tabernacle is at the very middle. On the outer layers, God gave instructions about altars and sacrifices, curtains and lampstands, and the cleansing rituals required of priests who sought to interact with God. But the most sacred place in the tabernacle was the holy of holies, a small chamber where one man—the high priest—could enter once a year to atone for his sin and the sins of the people. Within the holy of holies, at the heart of the tabernacle sat the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat (the ark's lid), the place where God's presence dwelled with His people.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God desires to be near His people.

Exodus 36

36:2-7. Because the people gave in response to the grace they had been given, each piece of gold, each gem, each bit of fabric was surely given willingly and cheerfully. Their offering was described as a freewill offering (v. 3)—nothing was given out of compulsion. The people saw the opportunity to be part of what God was doing by supplying the items needed to complete the tabernacle so they could experience God's dwelling with them in a new way.

Did God need the people to give so His tabernacle would be established? Certainly not. The God who created and sustains the world doesn't need a single thing from any of His creatures. Yet, He was kind to invite His people to be part of His work—to freely give and to give with joy. He does the same for us.

Similarly, God invites us to be a part of His work by giving our time, our abilities, and our finances to Him. We shouldn't think of this invitation as a command we must begrudgingly follow. As we grow in following God, we learn that everything we have—all our possessions, abilities, and time—has been given to us by God, the giver of all good things. When we give as God moves and changes our hearts, we grow in our likeness to Christ.

The people came together to give and work to build the visual reminder of God's presence with them. But notice what's missing—there's no grumbling against God, no rebellion against His commands, no fear of what others might do to them. They didn't ask why or create shortcuts. The people were finally learning what it meant to believe God's words and to obey His commands.

But we have to understand that the Israelites' obedience to God's blueprints for the tabernacle didn't earn God's favor or merit His presence. This was not a test on God's part—if they passed the test and obeyed, He would dwell with them, but if they failed, He would not. No, God would be present with His people for a different reason: because He had forgiven their sins. Their obedience mattered because it showed their reverence for Him. It showed that they desired to follow God's rules, a vast departure from their failed collection of manna before (Ex. 16).

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 96, DDG)*

Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live our lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).

TEACHING PLAN

As Moses summarized the people's work on the tabernacle, he wanted us to see that the people were learning to follow God's instructions. Every piece required artfulness and attention to detail and each person was needed, either as one who gave supplies or who helped construct the tent or craft its elements. Just as the tabernacle was an inside-out structure, so was the people's obedience to complete it. God's internal work within the hearts of His people was evident in their external work on the tabernacle He had prescribed.

- **How has God gifted you to serve Him and others in His kingdom?**

By the time we get to Exodus 40, Moses has shown how the Israelites took God's instructions about building the tabernacle and followed it to the letter. Every single thing was done exactly to the standards God set in Exodus 25–31. After the tabernacle was completed and successfully inspected by Moses, the people who desired God's presence more than anything watched as His glory descended on the tabernacle.

Read Exodus 40:34-38.

Just as the Lord led the people out of Egypt with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21), He began to lead His people through the tabernacle. The Lord came to His people to dwell among them and be their God forever. The tabernacle demonstrated two important truths to the Israelites: God is far too glorious to be contained by a tent, yet He is near.

This was also the point of the tabernacle with God's presence manifested in the holy of holies. God was near His people, and the location of the tabernacle further illustrated this. The tabernacle was placed at the center of the camp, signifying that God was in the midst of His people (Num. 2:17); He was not off to the side to be easily missed.

- **List other places in Scripture that mention God's desire to dwell among His people.**

At the same time, God was near without compromising His holiness. This was depicted by the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. The veil barred sinful humanity's access to holy God. God was near, but His people could not approach Him on their terms. They could only have access to God through a mediator—through the high priest coming to God after making purification for his sins and the sins of the people once a year on the Day of Atonement. In this, God was at once comforting His people with His presence and leaving them longing for more. The tabernacle was meant to declare that there must be a better way—a way for God to be with His people permanently without barriers. A way that pointed toward a better mediator, a perfect mediator: Christ Jesus.

Jesus took on flesh and "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14). He was the perfect fulfillment of what the tabernacle in Exodus pictured—God came down to earth to live among His people. Jesus then died in our place to be our atoning sacrifice for sin so we could be forgiven. When that sacrifice was made, the veil in the temple (which replaced the tabernacle) was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). Unhindered access to God was made possible through Christ for all who trust in Him to enjoy.

- **How does the truth that God dwells within you impact your everyday life?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God desires to be near His people.

Exodus 40

40:34-38. God manifested His presence earlier (and temporarily) to the Israelites through a "pillar of cloud." A cloud was visible over the tent outside the Israelite camp where Moses and the Lord talked (Ex. 13:21; 33:7-11). But here something new and fantastic happened. God visibly showed up in the heart of the camp, above the tabernacle, as Exodus 40 indicates:

> The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
>
> **Exodus 40:34-35**

Twice in these verses "the glory of the LORD" is emphasized. The term translated *glory* carries ideas both of *weightiness* and *brightness*. With reference to the God of Israel, glory refers to the overwhelming manifestation of His presence.

Thus, Moses—even after God appeared in the cloud over his tent outside the camp—had pleaded with God to allow Moses to see His glory (Ex. 33:18). God replied with a partial display of His glory to Moses (Ex. 33:19-23). Here, at last all the Israelites experienced the manifest presence of God, appearing in such a brightness that Moses couldn't even go into the tent.

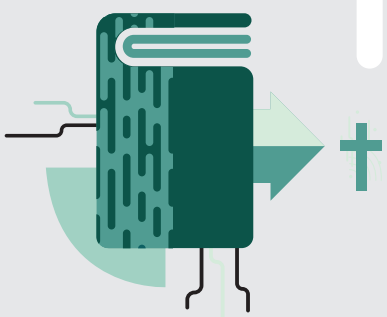
Activity

After the lesson, place students into groups and ask each group to find three objects in the room and come up with all the ways they think those three objects are alike. The team that comes up with the most connections wins. If they need help making connections, they could point out that all their objects are man-made, or lightweight, and so on. Let the groups share their commonalities. Give points to the team with the longest list of similarities in their objects.

Afterwards, point out that the students found ways to make connections in these random objects. Maybe some of their connections were a bit stretched (all our objects are solid!). In a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes different people and connects them together in the Body of Christ through Himself. Our common connection is treasuring Jesus and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

(p. 98, DDG) Christ Connection

God instructed the Israelites to build a tabernacle so He could dwell with them. God wants to be with His people. For this reason, God would later send His Son to "tabernacle," or dwell, with us in order to bring us into His presence.



LESSON 22: WHOLEHEARTEDNESS
A PLACE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

Exodus 36:2–7, 39:42–43, 40:34–38

A PLACE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

God desires to be near His people.

JESUS CONNECTION

God instructed the Israelites to build a tabernacle so He could dwell with them. God wants to be with His people. For this reason, God would later send His Son to "tabernacle," or dwell, with us in order to bring us into His presence.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

WHOLEHEARTEDNESS – Complete dedication in everything I do.

HEAD

What did the Israelites build and why?

Why did Moses have to tell them to stop giving?

HEART

Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." How dedicated are you to cleaning your room with your whole heart? What about doing your homework? Practicing a sport, activity or hobby? Giving your time to help a neighbor? What keeps you from doing these (or other things) wholeheartedly?

Is it important to do EVERYTHING wholeheartedly? Why or why not?

HANDS

This week, pick one area from the list below that you will commit to doing more wholeheartedly and write down 2 specific ways you can put that commitment into practice.

- Relationships (choose one sibling, friend, parent, etc.)
- School and homework (choose one class or teacher)
- Praying (talking) to God
- Helping someone in your family who needs it
- Giving any of your resources (time, money, skills) to serve others